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Louis Sullivan in Iowa

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LOUIS SULLIVAN IN IOWA

Architect Louis Sullivan came to Iowa late in his career, long after he won recognition as a major innovator in the design of American buildings. The Chicago firm of Adler and Sullivan created headlines in the 1880s for its bold attempts to unite utility and beauty in large structures, among them the Auditorium Building (1886-1889) erected near the city's lake-shore. A series of spectacular successes ensued: St. Louis's Wainwright Building (1890-1891), Chicago's Stock Exchange Building (1893-

1894), and Buffalo's Guaranty Building (1894-1895).

At the height of his fame, Sullivan received a commission to design the Transportation Building for the Columbian World Exposition, which opened in Chicago in 1893. Historians consider the Transportation Building the Exposition's single architectural achievement, but its imaginative design was lost amid the neo-classical structures that surrounded it on the fairgrounds. While the public embraced the gleaming Renaissance style adopted by most of the Exposition's architects, Sullivan



Louis Sullivan's painting of the proposed St. Paul's Methodist Church in Cedar Rapids (left), and the church as it appears today (right).

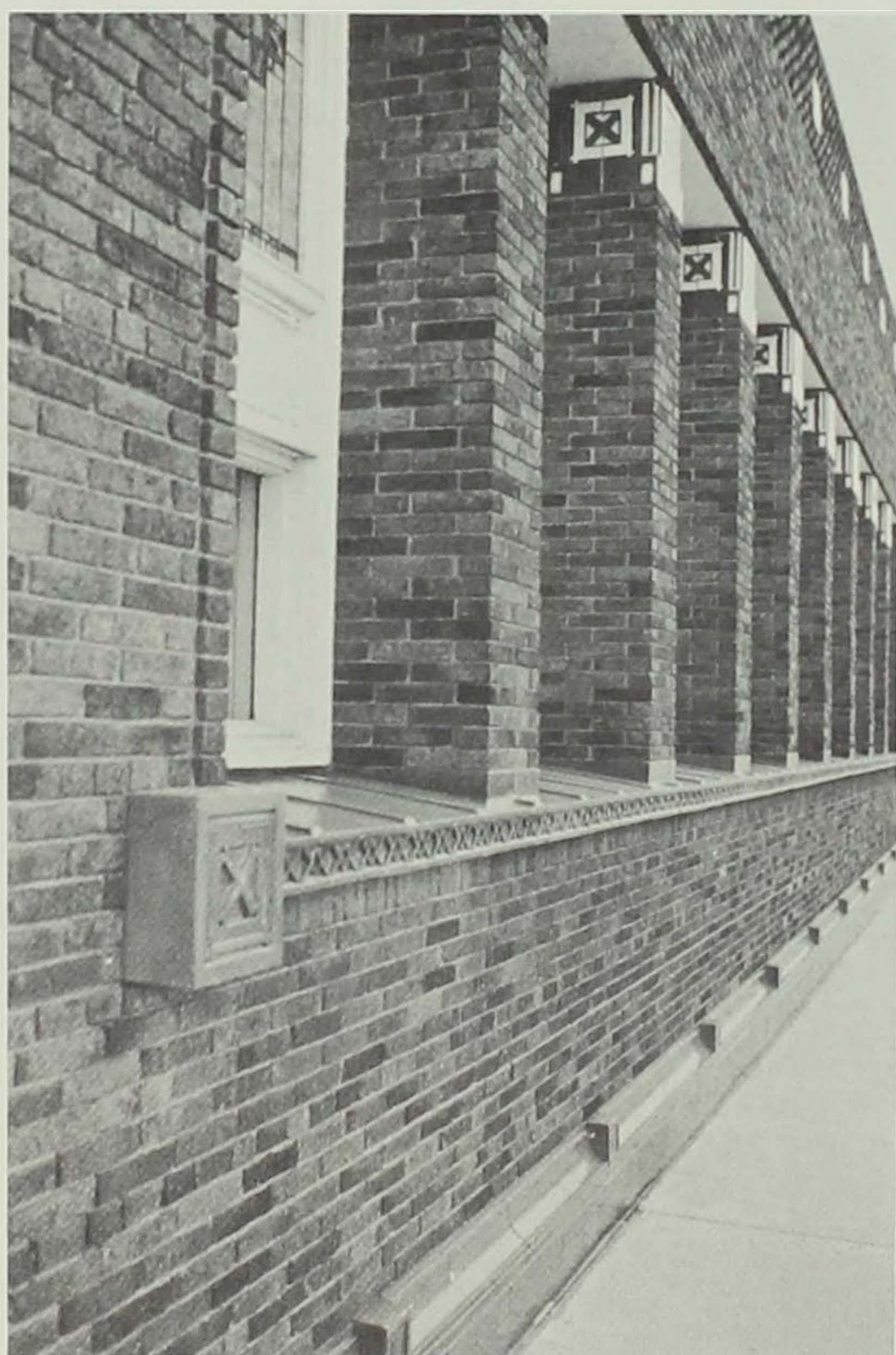
BY GERALD MANSHEIM

dismissed it as a "lewd exhibit of drooling imbecility and political debauchery."

Changing public tastes and the economic depression that befell the nation in the mid-1890s reduced the number of commissions offered to Adler and Sullivan. By 1895, declining income forced the architects to dissolve their partnership. Henceforth Sullivan worked under considerable hardship. Without Adler's considerable *savoir faire* in public relations, the irascible designer found it increasingly difficult to attract and hold clients, most of whom he viewed as vulgar philistines. Between 1900

and his death in 1924, Sullivan won only twenty commissions. Nearly all were in small cities and towns away from his Chicago home; five were in Iowa. Sullivan's buildings still stand in Cedar Rapids, Clinton, Grinnell, and Algona, although some have undergone alteration. Architects consider them among his most interesting work, for each of the buildings represents Sullivan's continuing search for a distinctive American design that did not rely on past cultures or outworn values.

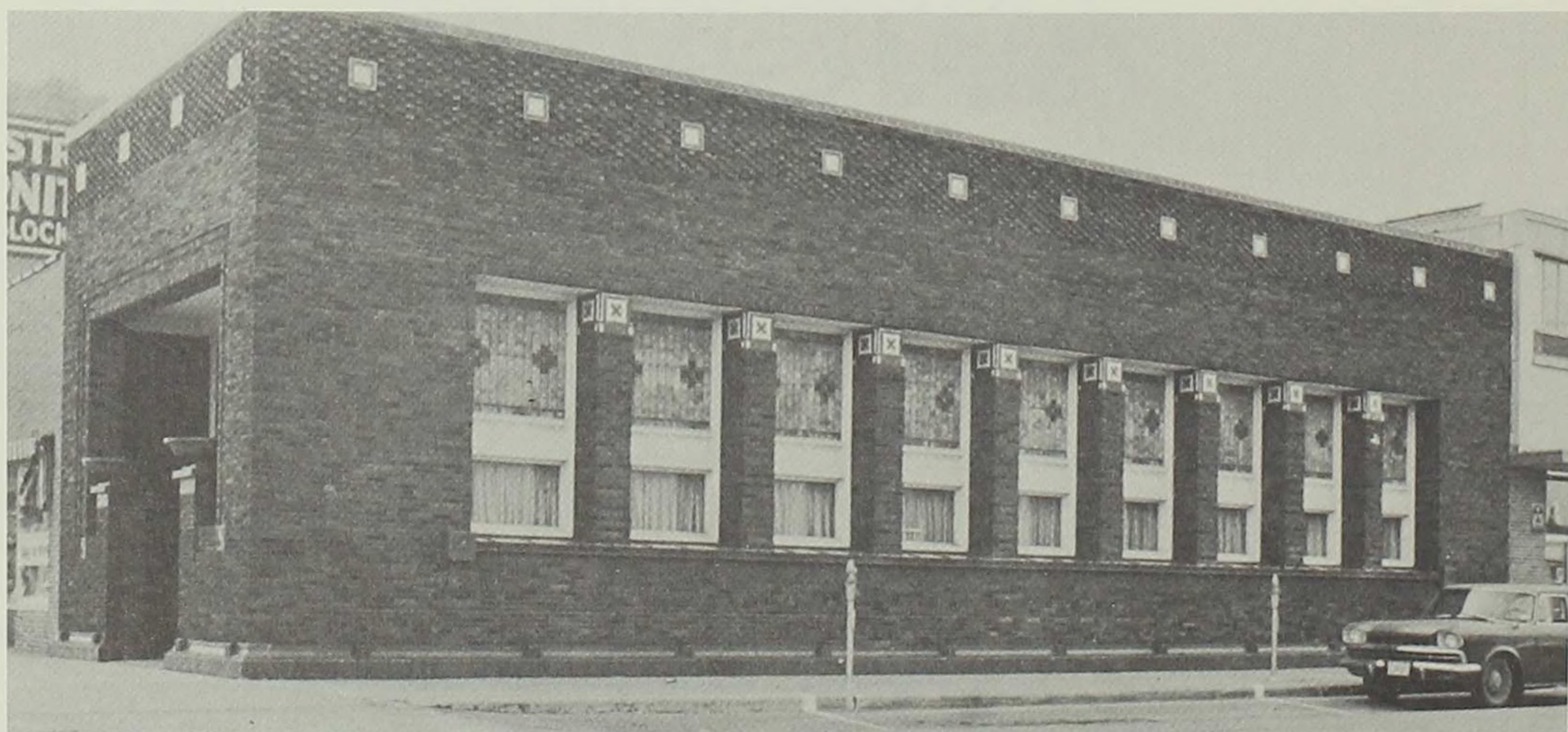
Gerald Mansheim's photographs survey the Sullivan legacy in Iowa.—WS



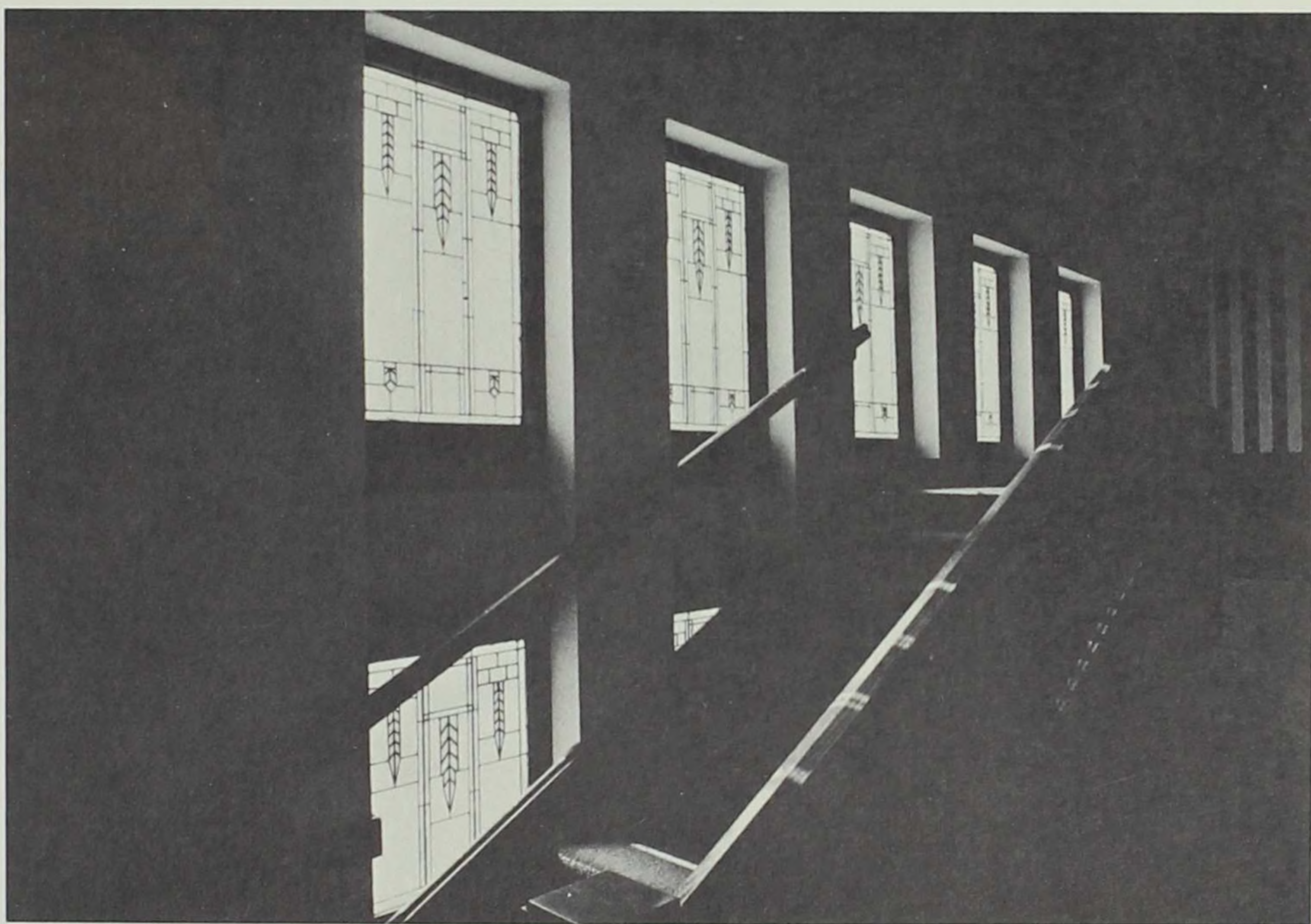
(courtesy Division of Historic Preservation)



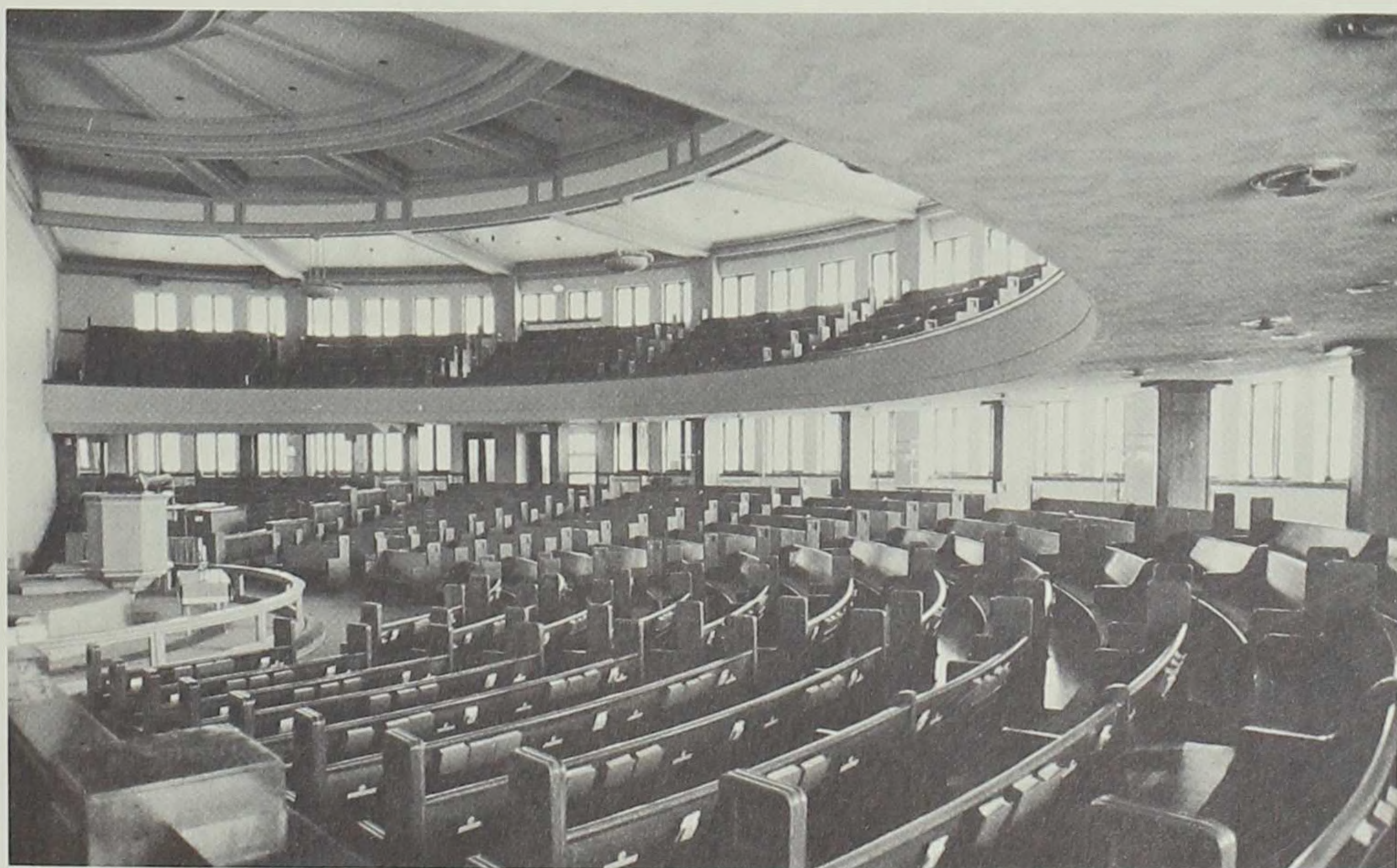
The Henry C. Adams Building in Algona (below) is a simple rectangular block. Subtle variations in the pattern of bricks, terra cotta panels and mouldings, and leaded glass windows (above left) enhance the structure's sturdy exterior. Completed in 1913, the building served as a realtor's office for many years and now houses Leuthold-Williams Clothiers. In the early 1970s, the owners engaged Des Moines architect William Wagner to install show windows sympathetic to the design of the original entrance (above right).

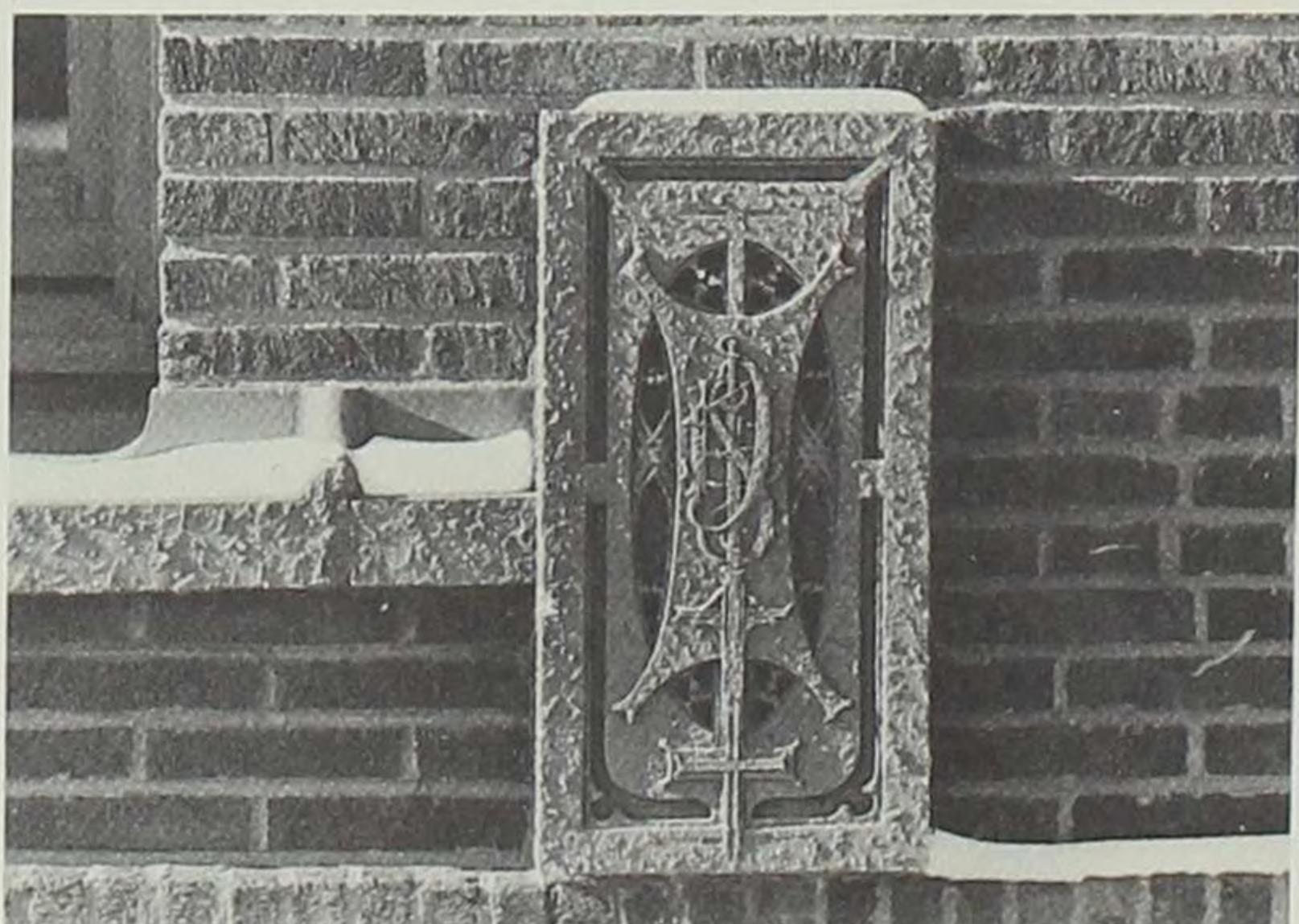
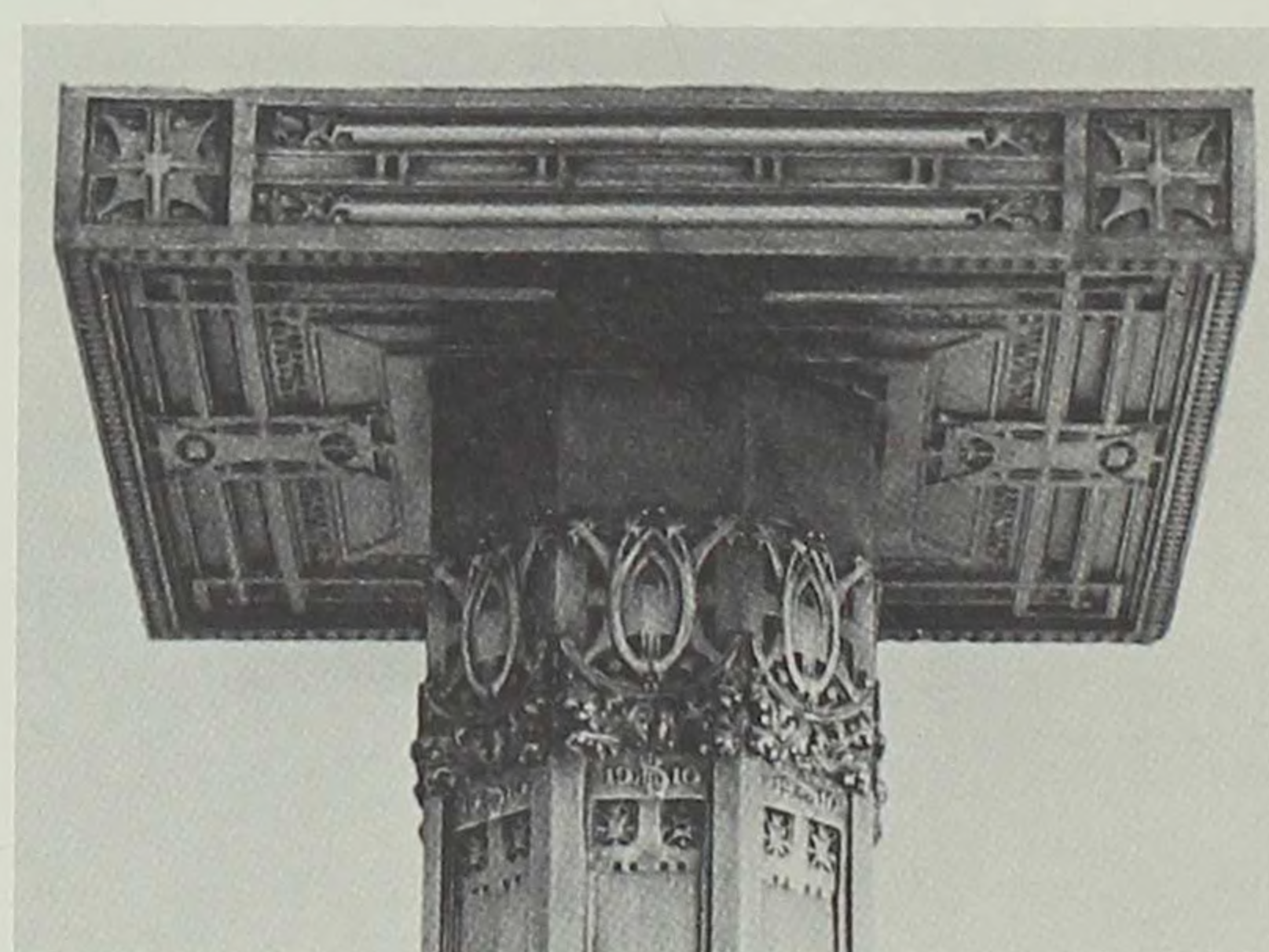


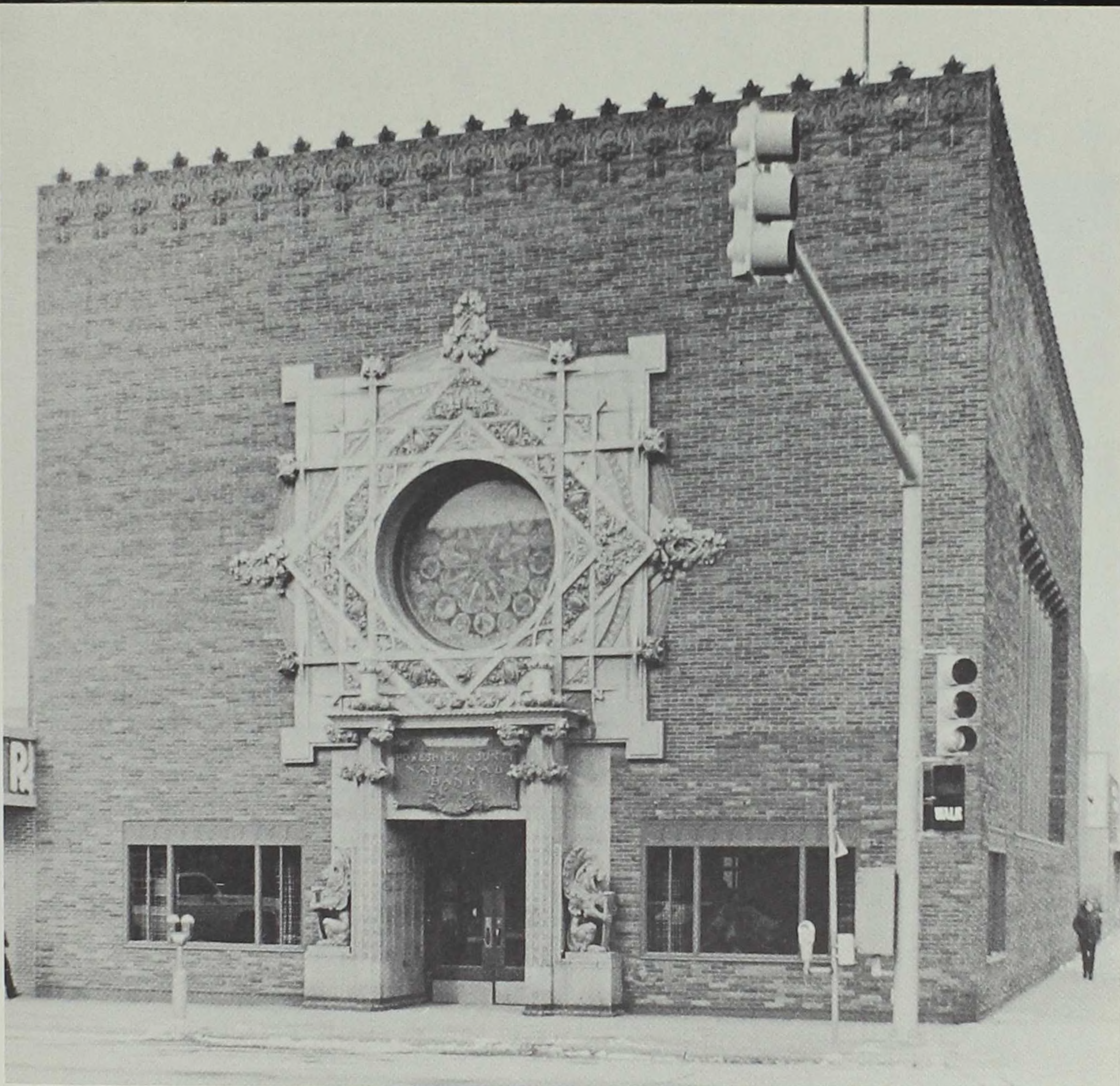
(courtesy Division of Historic Preservation)



(above) Stained-glass windows at St. Paul's Church in Cedar Rapids; (below) the sanctuary.







The home of the People's Bank and Trust Company exhibits Sullivan's dictum that form follows function: the original arrangement of a two-story public banking area surrounded by one-story office spaces is readily apparent from outside the building (opposite, top). Ornament gracing the Cedar Rapids bank includes sill stops and carved columns (left) and heraldic lions (far left).

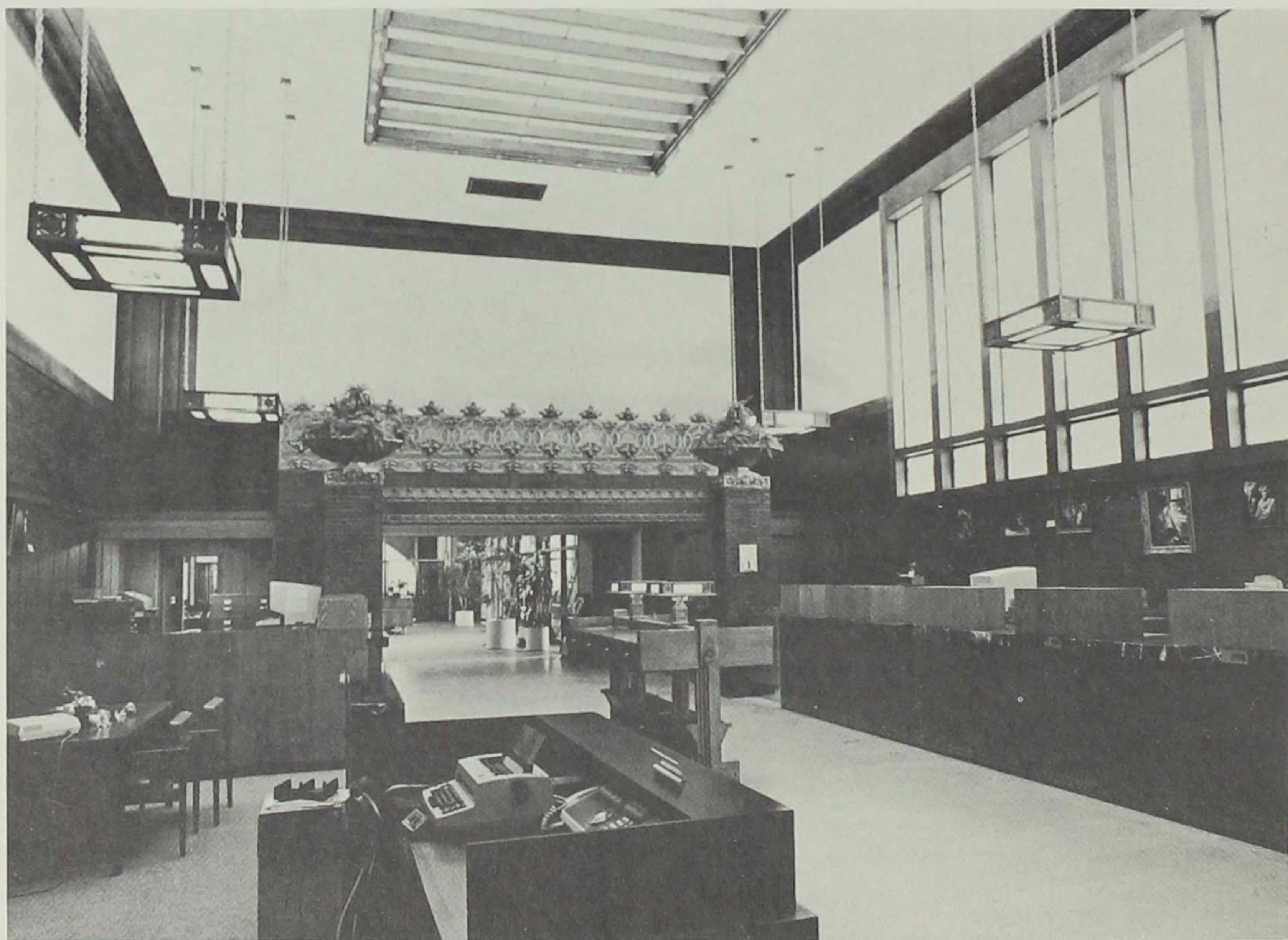
Above, Grinnell's Poweshiek County National Bank Building has been called "Sullivan's Jewel Box." The bank is a solid cubical mass whose walls contain bricks of dark blue, yellow buff, brown, and red. Sullivan sketched the building's essential features on his first visit to Grinnell in 1913. The bank was finished two years later. Below, an archi-

tect's drawing reveals the great volume of the building's interior.



LONGITUDINAL SECTION LOOKING WEST

(from *The Western Architect*, 1916)

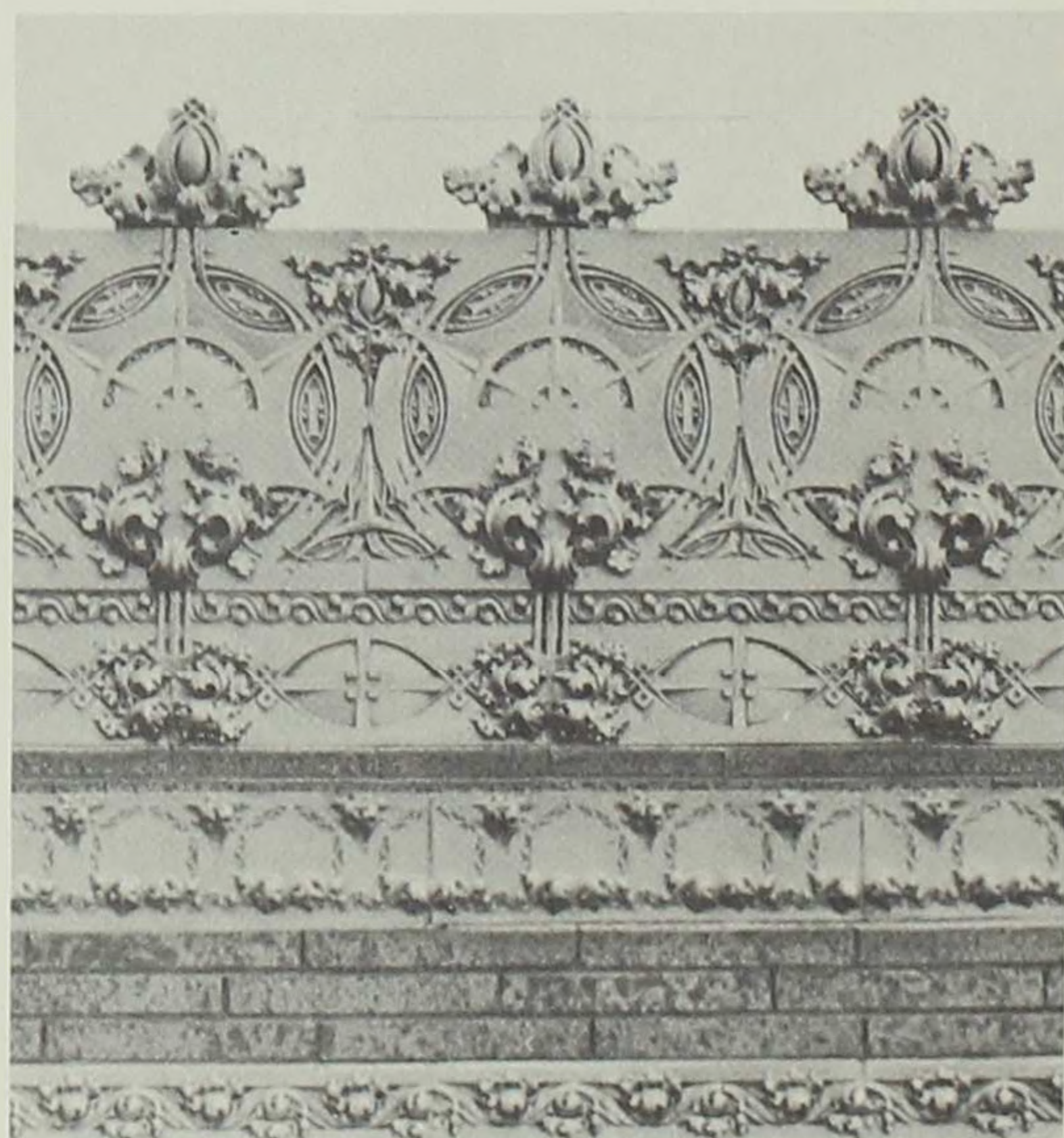


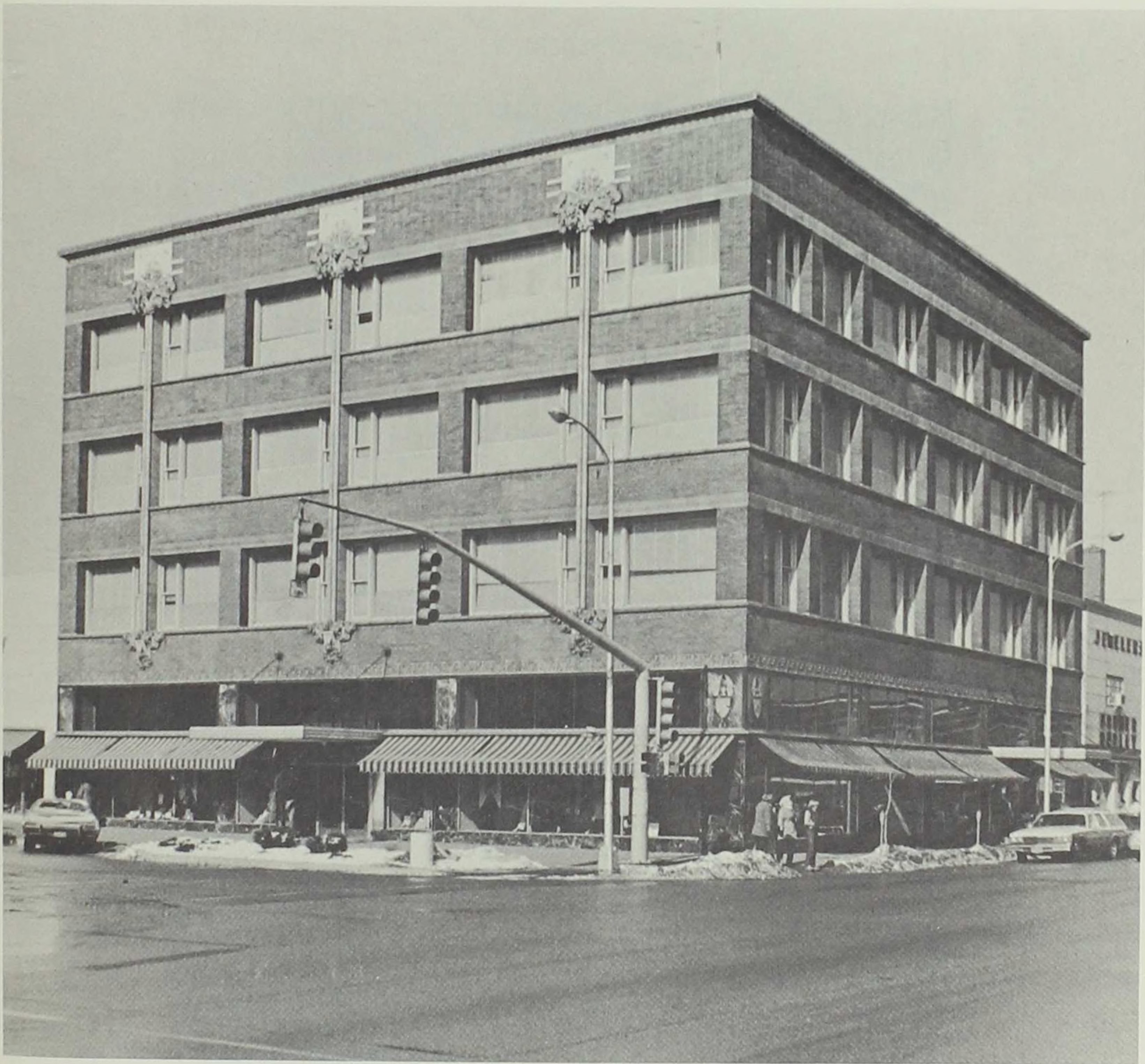
Note on Sources

Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney K. Robinson, *The Prairie School in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977), is a convenient guide to the work of Sullivan and other architectural innovators in Iowa. Also useful are: Joseph K. Brown, "Iowa's Jewel Boxes of Louis Sullivan," *The Iowan*, 6 (August-September 1958), 18-25; Hugh Morrison, *Louis Sullivan: Prophet of Modern Architecture* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1935); Albert Bush-Brown, *Louis Sullivan* (New York: George Braziller, 1960); and Willard Connely, *Louis Sullivan: The Shaping of American Architecture* (New York: Horizon Press, 1960).

For their help in gathering information on Sullivan's work in Iowa, the editor wishes to thank architect Phil Fedderson of Clinton; Max A. Smith, president of the Poweshiek County National Bank in Grinnell; Mrs. Carol Ridenour at St. Paul's Methodist Church in Cedar Rapids; Elaine A. Ott, James L. West, and Melvin J. McCalley at the People's Savings Bank in Cedar Rapids; and Bill Hasbrouck of Historic Resources in Chicago.

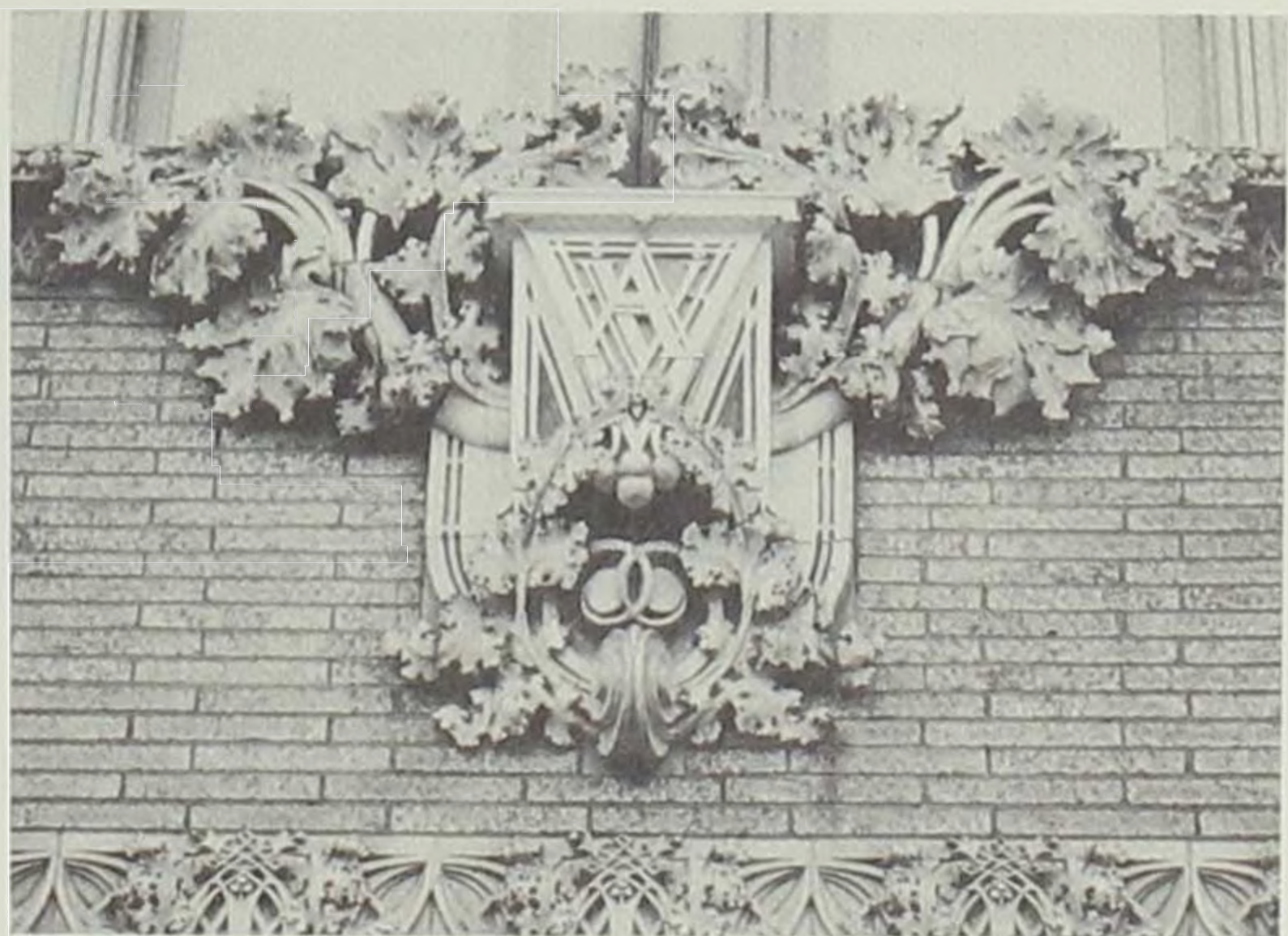
Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are from the collection of the State Historical Society.

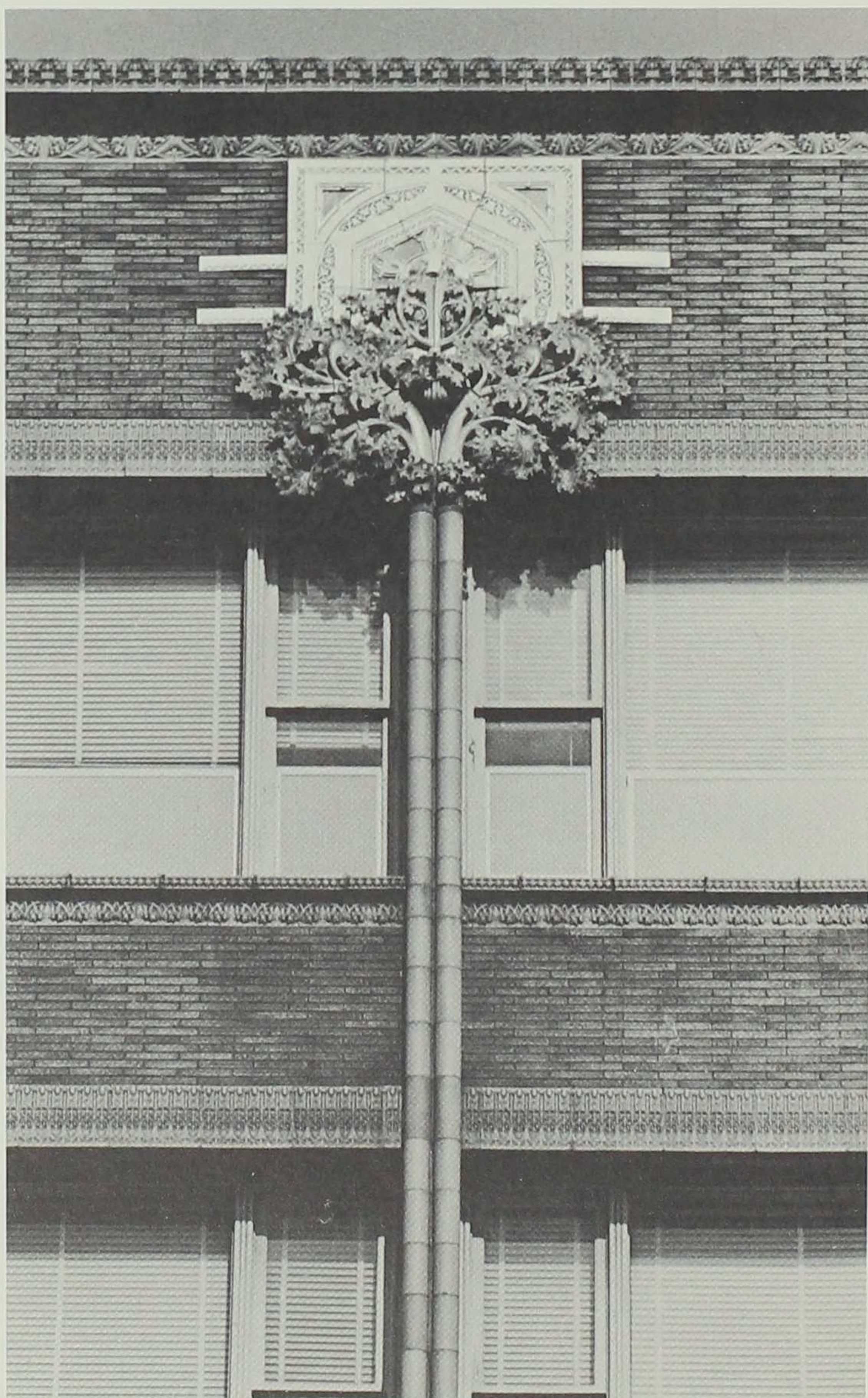




Fixtures (opposite, top) and ornament (left) within the Grinnell bank harmonize with the terra cotta detail of the bank's exterior walls. An addition to the original structure complements Sullivan's design.

Clinton's Van Allen Department Store (above) opened the same year as the Grinnell bank (1915) but shows little similarity to it other than the basic cubical shape. Horizontal bands of "Chicago Bay" windows circle the four-story building, whose facade carries terra cotta mullions rising from carved monograms above the street-level show windows (right).





The Van Allen Department Store's terra cotta mullions burst into vivid green foliations four stories above the sidewalk in downtown Clinton.